**Article of the Week #5 Summative Assessment Week of 10/21-10/28**

Some Parents Lie on Survey to Avoid English Learner Label for Children

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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In this Nov. 10, 2014, photo, Rosaisela Rodriguez reads with her children, Isabel Gutierrez and Rafael Gutierrez, at their home in Pleasant Hill, California. Rodriguez deliberately didn't declare that her twin son and daughter knew Spanish when she enrolled them in school, adding that most 5-year-olds are language learners, regardless of whether they are bilingual.

LOS ANGELES — Nieves Garcia came from Mexico at age 6 and spent most of her elementary school years in California classified as an "English learner" even after she learned the language. Now a mother, she didn't want her own daughter labeled the same way.

So she lied.

When Garcia signed up her daughter for kindergarten, she filled out a standard four-question survey. She said her family spoke only English at home, even though her husband doesn't speak the language.

**"English, English and English"**

"I just said we spoke English, English, English and English," Garcia said.

California education officials say it's tough to know how many parents lie on the home language survey they must fill out before their children start public school. Educators say it's important to identify which children need extra help with the English language. Not getting the necessary help can set children back in their schoolwork. It also violates federal laws guaranteeing access to education.

Parents like Garcia fear that by acknowledging the truth, their kids will be separated from native English speakers or negatively labeled. They could also miss out on learning opportunities, such as advanced classes.

Rosaisela Rodriguez deliberately didn't declare that her twin son and daughter knew Spanish when she enrolled them in school. She said most 5-year-olds are language learners, regardless of whether they are bilingual, speaking two languages.

"If they were placed in the English language group they would have been taken out at a certain time or placed in different curriculum," said Rodriguez, of Pleasant Hill, California.

**Getting More Consistent**

In a world where people increasingly speak different languages, many states are taking another look how they define and identify English learners. They hope this will help them move toward a more consistent system, education experts said.

California plans to roll out a new English language proficiency test in 2016. The state is also considering changing its home language survey, said Elena Fajardo, administrator of the California Department of Education's language policy. The survey was developed in 1980 and the state's population and immigration patterns have changed since then.

Nearly 44 percent of Californians age 5 and older speak a language other than English, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the government agency that counts and surveys Americans. The most common language spoken is Spanish, and 57 percent of Spanish speakers in the state say they also speak English very well.

That's a major shift from 1990. Then, less than a third of the state's residents age 5 and older spoke another language, and less than half of Spanish-speaking Californians claimed to speak English very well.

**Some Are Bilingual**

Most states screen children initially through the home language survey. Children whose families speak another language are tested to see how well they know English.

In California, nearly a quarter of public school students are considered English learners. In 2012, more than 200,000 incoming kindergarteners were given the test. Only 9 percent were able to speak the language well, according to state data. Those results have led some parents to slam the use of a single day of testing of preschoolers — and an exam some say is too difficult — to determine a child's educational path.

Alison Bailey is a professor who researches bilingualism at the University of California, Los Angeles. She said many states, including California's, don't really consider the possibility that a child might be bilingual.

"There are competent bilingual children who would do as well in an English language environment as any other," she said. She thinks fewer children should be selected to take the English language test.

**Hint: Don't Write "Ingles"**

Some parents don't want their children classified as English learners. They fear their kids won't be able to move into more advanced coursework in middle and high school due to additional language requirements. Also, state data shows that English learners don't perform as well on the California High School Exit Exam, which is a requirement for graduation from California high schools. However, students who were initially considered English learners and then reclassified later did better than English-only speakers on the test.

Cheryl Ortega is the director of bilingual education for United Teachers Los Angeles. She said she's seen Spanish-speaking parents write on the home language survey that English is spoken at home by using the Spanish word "ingles" for English. She said educators ought to meet with parents before filling out the survey and explain the process to ease their concerns.

Earlier this year, Tesha Sengupta-Irving, an education professor, registered her son for kindergarten. At the time, her parents were visiting and she was speaking to them in their native tongue, Bengali, so she wrote on her survey that Bengali was spoken at home.

Her son, who knew just a few words in Bengali, was tested and classified as an English learner. She said the results were surprising since she had tirelessly tried to teach him Bengali and he still spoke only English.

Sengupta-Irving said the survey didn't seem so important and was one of a dozen forms she filled out to enroll her son in school. "It is catching too many kids."